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THE POET'S BRIDE.

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## THE POET AND HIS BRIDE.

A True Tale of a Pure Love.



MONG the children who played in the magnificent grounds of the stately Chateau de Boncourt, there was one unlike the rest in mental traits, as also in the possession of a rich and tender fancy, through which, young as he was, he viewed the external world. Everything around him was calculated not only to nourish this, but also to implant and cherish that *esprit de corps* which characterized the old nobility of France, more, perhaps, than that of any other country. His family had been pre-eminently loyal, had enjoyed uninterrupted wealth, a succession of honors, and had intermarried with various reigning houses. Thickly around were strewn the carefully preserved souvenirs of countless gallant achievements, of events which had become history, of superb festivals, and princely weddings. Over these the boy sometimes brooded, and there was one which particularly attracted his eye—a sword, bestowed with the rank of captain upon his grandfather, at the age of fifteen, for a service which proved his right to that advancement. But a new plant or a roving insect gave him greater pleasure than the stained and moth-eaten banners which drooped idly in the chapel, or the chains, the helmets, and the linked mail which shone proudly in the great hall, or hung, covered with dust, in the armory. The flitting of a bird's wing, the chime of the vesper bells faintly heard in the twilight, the conflict of clouds borne on opposing winds, the gleam of the lightning, had for the little Adalbert von Chamisso a fascination as irresistible as it was singular.

The Revolution broke rudely upon his dreams, and his family, reduced to a point but one removed from poverty, succeeded in crossing the frontier. Attached as they were to station and privilege, the glitter of orders and the array of titles, necessity compelled them to seek for him some better dependence than an empty name, and he entered as a pupil the painting department of the royal porcelain manufactory of Berlin. At fifteen, he was placed among the Queen of Prussia's pages; a

change which aided to give his opinions that soundness and depth for which they were, later in life, distinguished. At seventeen, after a prolonged inward struggle, reluctantly, and haunted by gloomy forebodings, he entered the Prussian army, and in three years received a lieutenancy. Notwithstanding his enthusiasm, his gallantry, and his restless activity, the career of arms was not that for which he was best fitted; and its early termination, through no fault of his own, was not to be regretted, save for the mortification which he endured on that account. During this period, he had not been idle. He had been a careful student, and had done much towards mastering the language in which he was to win an honest and enduring fame. He had fallen in love, also, with the pretty and fascinating widow, Madame Ceres Duvernay, and manfully proposed for her hand, saying to himself, "Love needs so little." Luckily, Madame knew better. Did it not need satins and laces, a new jewel now and then, a floor in town, a cottage in the country, saddle-horses and servants? Certainly—so she kissed her hand to the handsome, large-natured youth whose soul was in his soft, expressive eyes, and left him to his books, and to the group of friends whose affection soon enabled him to forget his transient passion. La Motte Fouque, Neumann, De la Foye, and Hitzig were among them, and not one but retained a place in his heart through every alternation of good and evil fortune. They started a poetic annual called "The Green Book," which was greatly admired, and through the medium of which Freiligrath ultimately became known to the public.

Weary, because purposeless, years followed, yet they could not have been altogether wasted. Closely allied both by birth and education to the higher orders, Chamisso yet approved that vast social change which had brought to him only misfortunes; looking below the surface to its primal principle, forgiving its first wild excesses, never swayed by selfishness on the one hand, never betrayed into fanaticism on the other, and warmly cherishing the memory of the past, hopeful for the future, whose promise was at best fitful and often clouded, he was gradually developing into one of the noblest specimens of a man, a subject, and a citizen. Early exiled from France and transferred in boyhood to Germany, he belonged to neither country. "Here, the soil; there, the

men, are foreign to me," he said. He joined his family in their country to which they had returned, but he was not content, and returned to Berlin. In Hitzig's house he came nearer to repose.

Thoroughly generous, that accomplished writer occasionally adopted the orphan child of a friend, and so was always surrounded by a blooming band growing into estimable womanhood amidst healthful home training and influences. To them, as to their elders, Chamisso was a welcome guest. Numberless were the drafts which he made for them upon his exhaustless imagination. Grotesque tales worthy the soil of Iran, wild legends, witty caricatures, charming allegories, exquisite moral stories, interspersed with snatches of song, and little poems worthy of the "Green Book," followed each other, often in quick succession. Curious pantomimes sometimes filled up the evening, in which his execution was admirable.

Among the children who crowded about him, was one, Antonie Piaste, who, more frequently than the others, found a place upon his knee, and upon whose intelligent countenance his gaze rested with peculiar pleasure. Shy at first, she learned to creep closer and closer to him. Nothing was wanting to the visit if his fingers might toy with her silken hair, or fold over the small hand which impulsively sought their clasp. One night, when she was about eight years of age, forgetful of a promised glimpse of fairy land, she asked him about his childhood. After relating some anecdotes with blended glee and sadness, he repeated the following, written by himself, than which few things more touching have been penned:

A dream wafts me back to childhood,  
And I shake my hoary head;  
How ye crowd on my soul, ye visions,  
I thought were forever fled!

There glistens o'er dusky foliage  
A lordly pile elate;  
I know those towers and turrets,  
The bridges, the massive gate.

Welcoming, kindly faces  
The armorial lions show;  
I greet each old acquaintance,  
As in through the arch I go.

There lies the Sphinx at the fountain;  
There darkly the flag-tree gleams;  
'Twas yonder, behind those windows,  
I was wrapt in my earliest dreams.



I enter the chapel, and look for  
My ancestor's hallowed grave;  
'Tis here, and on yonder pillar,  
Is hanging his antique glaive.

I try to decipher the legend,  
But a mist is upon my eyes,  
Though the light from the painted window,  
Full on the marble lies.

Home of my fathers, how plainly  
Thou standest before me now!  
Yet thou from the earth art vanished,  
And over thee goes the plow.

*Fruitful, dear earth, be thou ever;  
My fondest blessings on thee!  
And a double blessing go with him  
That plows thee, who e'er he be!*

For me, to my destiny yielding,  
I will go with my harp in my hand,  
And wander the wide world over,  
Singing from land to land.

There was silence for some minutes after he had finished; the younger members of his audience, subdued by his voice and manner, the older ones melted by the rare skill of the poet in giving utterance to his reformatory faith, mingled with his affectionate recollections. At length Loest looked up and said, smilingly, "You, too, my friend, must make as well as describe a home." And hastily weaving together some flowers from a vase near, she placed them upon Antonie's head, and formally betrothed her to him. All laughingly offered their congratulations, while Hitzig, with many jokes, pretended to instruct her in the duties of her new position. "Who knows," he said, as, having finished, he observed Chamisso kissing again his little bride, "who knows? She will surely be both handsome and good, and ten years, after all, is no great time to wait."

Still, aimlessly crept the months by Chamisso until he entered the University of Berlin, and gave himself to the study of anatomy and physiology, in order to fit himself to join a scientific expedition. In 1813 he wrote for the Hitzig circle his famous Peter Schlemihl, by which work he is best known in America. In 1815 he sailed upon a voyage of discovery, under the command of Otto von Kotzebue, son of the author of that name, to be absent three years. He returned to Berlin in the autumn of 1818.

Hastening to Hitzig's house, he was heartily welcomed, but after the first greeting was over, he missed the child bride who had clung to him at parting, and wept so sadly at their long separation.

Her gentle presence had haunted him on the ocean, her voice had been in the wind as it played upon the masts and swept in music through the spars and cordage, her eyes had looked up from the moonlit waters lightly tossing beneath the swift-winged ship. Nothing curious or rare had presented itself, but had in some way reminded him of her, and all the wild and strange material for tales of sea and land which he had treasured, had linked itself with her memory. And now she was no longer his loving child bride, but a charming woman, just the style of woman best calculated to captivate him. Accustomed to society so thoroughly scholarly that although ignorance was a disgrace, learning did not entitle to praise; listening to conversations which ranged freely and brilliantly through every department of literature and art; breathing perpetually an atmosphere redolent of disinterested friendship, her mind, her heart, and manner exhibited an exquisite harmony. Chamisso, as he looked at her, remembered his age—he was almost thirty-seven—the white hairs which had sown themselves among the darker locks, his bronzed cheeks, his muscular figure, his pipe, his careless dress, and his suddenly abstracted and humble air seemed cold and strange. Antonie, too, found herself in a false position. Often, as she had traced his proposed course upon her maps, or sought in books information concerning the points at which he expected to touch, she had pictured their meeting, not as lovers certainly, but as dear friends, all formality banished, all ceremony put aside, with less familiarity, but with all the old trust and truth. But when the occasion came, she saw only the traveler and poet, and she also grew timid; so that the bond so delightful to both seemed indeed broken.

Chamisso tried to forget his wishes, and busied himself in publishing an interesting account of his voyage, which is even now well worthy of perusal. As if to encourage him, his friend Neumann was accepted by one of Hitzig's adopted daughters. She came to meet him after his betrothal, and he, quite beside himself with pleasure, caught her in his vigorous arms, ran up stairs with her to the common sitting-room, and bestowed upon her a hearty kiss. De la Foye married, also, and Chamisso determined to learn his fate. Rambling with Antonie in the Botanic Garden one afternoon in the early spring, he exclaimed, "What a beautiful thing your sister has

done in giving herself to our friend Neumann!"

"Ah, yes!" returned Antonie, "love is always beautiful."

"But he is so old—nearly or quite as old as myself."

"Old!" replied Antonie in surprise. "Truly, if there is anything wonderful about it, it is that he so willingly gives his disciplined strength for her immature weakness."

"But when he is broken with age, she will be only in her prime."

"Physically, yes; therefore the arrangement is perfect. She will lean upon him now, he will lean upon her hereafter. Their union will thus be entire and lifelong. There will never come a time when one will not need the other."

The rays of the declining sun glanced brightly over the swelling leaf-buds and early blossoms, and a robin, alighting upon a bough just above the speakers, commenced her good-night carol. What more was said, we do not know; but at Hitzig's house there was a new betrothal, and pretty soon Antonie bought her simple wedding-dress.

Chamisso was appointed curator of the Botanic Garden, and May 7, 1819, wrote thus: \* \* \* "You know my bride, Antonie Piaste, the handsomest and dearest of those maidens whom, as Hoffman says, Hitzig keeps about him to kiss his hand and call him papa—the one whom Loest betrothed to me, as a child, in 1807—now I fetch her home. I have chosen with my understanding, and taken hold of the chosen object with my heart. \* \* \* If you come back soon to Berlin, I hope that you will find me in a little house that stands close by the Botanic Garden, (I am the director's assistant, with a salary of six hundred dollars, and have selected that little house for my official residence,) busily and pleasantly occupied with my flowers, and with a helpmate like them. But if any old friend returns here twenty years hence, then I hope to God he may find me just as ever, engaged with my flowers and my helpmate, only there shall sit by our side a blooming girl that shall repeat faithfully and unaltered her mother's present image \* \* \* for I should be loth to forego the pure satisfaction with which my artistic eye rests on my Antonie's form."

In 1825, Chamisso was called to Paris to receive 100,000 francs from the Commissioners of the Indemnity Fund. He

was feted and caressed, but wrote to his wife, "Don't forget the roses; don't forget the children's letters; don't forget to strew food for sparrows on my window. I shall return to you the same as I left you; let me find everything again just as it was."

His poetical reputation increased until he became a decided favorite with the public. Honors also were conferred upon him as a naturalist, which he enjoyed in his own guileless, conscientious way. In 1837, his wife died, and he survived her only fifteen months. His last lines were written for the benefit of a washerwoman, and produced one hundred and fifty dollars.

A thoroughly earnest, active, truthful man, Chamisso wins the affection of his readers so quietly that one does not know he is knocking at his heart until he has already entered.

### MEMORY.

BEFORE me, in a silver bowl  
Of still more silvery water, floats  
A pure camelia, and my soul  
Upon its perfumed radiance dotes.  
It steals my senses, till it seems  
The real is unreal and dim—  
A lake of magic beauty gleams,  
And in its breast a flower doth swim.

I see its silken roots downspread  
As golden as a mermaid's hair,  
Streaming in many a yellow thread  
From shining shoulders wet and bare.  
The crystal lake is deep and still,  
The heaven is high and softly blue,  
The shadows from a mighty hill  
Mix with the sunset's amber hue.

Between the mountains wafted in  
Come clouds of odors from the plains,  
Mixed with the sweet, re-echoing din  
Of pipes and shepherd's rustic strains.  
Over the waves a boat doth drift,  
Aimless and idle as a weed—  
The hills into the heavens might lift  
And those within it take no heed!

They follow in the golden wake  
Of rippling splendor; but their eyes  
More light and glory give and take  
Than in the whole broad sunset lies.  
As in the lengthening shade they glide  
A lily glimmers in their path,  
Now rocking on the silver tide,  
Now dipping to her vestal bath.

He stooped and plucked it from the sea,  
He placed it in his love's white vest:  
He said, "It grew to image thee.  
Sweet! hide it in thy holier breast."

Oh, God!—recede, thou happy dream!  
Trouble no more my passive soul!  
'Tis but a white camelia's gleam  
Breaking athwart a silver bowl.

### DREAM LAND.\*

Down a silent, tideless river,  
Which we mortals have named Sleep,  
Floats my soul all wrapt in slumber—  
Floats adown its waters deep;  
O, and on it drifteth slowly  
With no sight, or shape around,  
Through the silence and the darkness,  
And the mystery profound.

As the thistle-down, wind-wafted,  
Floateth without power or will,  
So my soul floats o'er that river—  
O'er its depths so dark and still;  
Till like summer dawn there riseth  
O'er the dark, a golden light,  
And through shadowy-built portals,  
She beholds that region bright.

Oh! the glory of the Dream-land!  
Who the tale shall dare to tell,  
Of the strange and mystic beauty  
That within it e'er doth dwell?  
Of the sights and sounds mysterious,  
Of the shapes that through it glide,  
With the old beloved faces,  
Yet so strangely glorified?

Of its treasures, weird yet lovely.  
Like the secrets of the sea;  
Mortal eye may never fathom  
All its beauteous mystery!  
Far beyond our sunny Earthland,  
Spreads this country fair, serene,  
Through the clouds at sunset oft-times,  
And in "golden vistas" seen;—

Through the clouds that, high and snow-tipt,  
Hide its portals from our sight,  
Save when souls are borne beyond them  
On the thought-wings of the night.  
Mist enveloped and surrounded,  
Dim its valleys stretch away,  
Dewy silence on its bosom  
Now a mystic veil doth lay.

Slope afar the shadowy mountains,  
And in dreamlight faint and fade,  
While the darkling forest branches,  
Never into song are swayed.  
In that mystic land of shadows  
Gleaming cities proudly rise,  
From the plain and from the hill-side,  
Looking to the dreamy skies.

Through their glittering palace highways,  
Flows a stream of phantom life;  
Lo! the forms of dead are living  
Mingling in their busy strife.

\* By Miss Caroline A. Hawley, Albany, New-York.  
Awarded the Gold Medal by the Alumnae of the  
Albany Female Academy.

And from out their tide flash faces  
Mournful, and unearthly sweet,  
Silent pass the mystic comers  
Through the Dream-land cities fleet

But from that enchanted city  
Now my soul doth onward glide,  
Until bright before me spreadeth  
Dream-land's loveliness and pride;  
Mid the clouds, that clasp encircling,  
Like a gem in setting rare,  
Peaceful lies the stilly country,  
With its vales and hill-tops fair.

Brighter than the earth is Dream-land,  
For a spell is o'er it cast,  
That within its sheen and shadow,  
Blends the future and the past;  
And each rill and forest streamlet,  
That among its shades doth flow,  
Murmurs with its gentle cadence  
All sweet thoughts of long ago.

Often through that silent country,  
In a mystic maze of dreams,  
Have I wandered in its forests,  
And beside its rushing streams;  
Wandered in the Dream-land forests—  
In their depths, with shadow grey,  
Listened to the winds' wild music,  
Watched the branches graceful sway;

Listened to the wind that ever  
Haunts these wood aisles, deep and dim,  
With its music, sweet as echoes  
Of the angels' harp-swept hymn;  
While the trees down darksome bending,  
Whispered to my soul strange words,  
Bright hopes flew into the future,  
Like a flock of white-winged birds.

And the turmoil and the sorrow  
Of earth, faded soft away,  
And this life unto my spirit,  
Seemed one fair dream-woven day.  
Oh! the rushing streams of Dream-land!  
Sunlight kissed, that ever glide,  
Through that distant country, sweeping  
With a foam-white, flashing tide.

Oft my dreaming soul hath marveled  
At their course of mystery,  
Flowing, falling through the silence  
To an unknown shoreless sea;  
O'er their rocky banks the branches  
Listen to their wondrous song,  
And the perfumed wings of blossoms  
On their current float along;

With a glimpse of sun and shadow,  
Purple sky, and drifting cloud,  
Tree, and rock, and far, dark forests,  
That their fleeting waters crowd.  
But behold! the fairy country  
Fadeth slowly on my sight—  
Fade its glorious hill-side cities,  
Darkling wood and streamlet bright.

Floating now o'er Sleep's mute river,  
O'er that dark and tideless main,  
I awake in dewy morning,  
On the sunny Earth again.